

TO BE SUCCEDED IN A DOMINATED SOCIETY: THE DREAMS OF A BLACK FAMILY IN LORRAINE HANSBERRYS A RAISIN IN THE SUN

BINI VARGHESE. V

Research Scholar, M. S University, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

In the mid-twentieth century, the poor African American people were marginalised by the white neighbours, so that, they had to give up their lives' enjoyments. At that time black writers arose and give their voice to the inclusion of blacks in the society. One such great illustrious black woman writer was Lorraine Hansberry. Her writings echo the whole society in her period. She wrote many plays, but *A Raisin in the Sun* did a much to the acknowledgement of blacks. She created the characters in the play in such a significant role and each character in the play is given equal interest. This paper is attempted to analyse the great effort a black family have endured when they sought to break out the racially built stumbling blocks to accomplish their dreams successful. Mama, one of the important characters in the family, the mother of two grown children, is the moral fibre of the family. Even if her son made many mistakes and fought for unwanted things, she overwhelmed him by giving her massive love to him. She brought together everybody's dream and tried to persuade everything with that. Regardless of their sufferings socially and economically, at last, they succeeded in their dreams in a dominated white society.

KEYWORDS: A Raisin in the Sun, African American, Black Dreams, Lorraine Hansberry, Racism

ABBREVIATION

ARITS - A Raisin in the Sun

INTRODUCTION

Contents

A Raisin in the Sun, a drama by a dazzling African American female playwright Lorraine Hansberry, is set in the Southside Chicago, sometimes between the World War II. It is the play about a black family, who strives hard to make their dream true in a socially dominated society. In the seventeenth century, the African people by ships. There were plenty of people were died of ill health and the many women were molested by the white masters and died of pain in the ships itself. The remaining people were taken to the European continents as slaves and served them for nothing. During the slavery time the blacks were proscribed to deliver their throbbing by any means they have been encountered for years. The arising of various movements for the liberation of black people paved way for liberating themselves from the strictures of the dominated society. They used writing as a weapon to explode the racially built hedges to penetrate into an antiracial equally balanced society. One such gifted writer was Lorraine Hansberry. Though her lifespan was very short, she did much for the growth of a muscular black society. Her play *A Raisin in the Sun* gave her fame and name by its astonishing theme. Anita Singh, in her analysis says, "... it is a social protest play intended to persuade white people that black people are not only good at heart but sufficiently like whites in their values and cultural practices for whites to allow blacks to be their neighbors (Singh 32).

In this paper, I bring about the hardships have been experienced by a black family, named, 'Younger family' to overcome the impediments and to achieve something they have desired for. Each character in the family is given importance in one way or other. Lena Younger often called 'Mama', the mother of Walter Lee Younger and Beneatha. The whole family was waiting for the check of Big Youngers' insurance money. Hansberry put in writing the whole family's dreams in a very appealing approach.

Walter Younger's death surfaced a way for the economic security to his family through insurance money. They were living in a congested small house, which Lena and her husband found contentment in their early days. They satisfied with the place they had and arranged everything in hope and ecstasy. But, the younger generation found it difficult to confine themselves in the clogged diminutive situation. Everybody struggles hard to move forward in the competitive subjugated society. For example Walter lee was working as a chauffeur. As Mama's only son, Walter serves as both protagonist and antagonist of the play. The plot turns around him and the actions that he takes, and his character develops the most during the course of the play. Most of his actions and mistakes hurt the family greatly, but his lately rise to manhood makes him a sort of hero in the last scene. Throughout the play, Walter provides an everyman outlook of the mid-twentieth-century African-American male. He is the typical man of the family who struggles to support it and who tries to discover new, better schemes to secure its economic prosperity. Difficulties and barriers that obstruct him and his family's progress to attain that prosperity constantly frustrate Walter. He believes that money will solve all of their problems, but he is rarely successful with money.

He is wearied of working as a chauffeur and wanted to start a liquor store. Often he wanted the attention of his family members, but nobody liked his wish for opening a liquor store. Once he had an argument with his mother, Mama about the liquor shop and he shouted as:

MAMA Son -----

WALTER WILL SOMEBODY PLEASE LISTEN TO ME TODAY!

MAMA (*Quietly*) I don't 'low no yellin' in this house, Walter Lee, and you know

it--- (Walter stares at them in frustration and stares to speak several times)

And there ain't going to be no investing in no liquor stores (ARITS 70).

Unlike Walter, Mama had another dream which is very much essential for their life, i.e. a new house for them in Morgan Park. Her longing for having a new house in her expression is:

"Rat trap" --- yes, that's all it is. (*Smiling*) I remember just as well the day me and Big

Walter moved in here. Hadn't been married but two weeks and wasn't planning on living

here no more than a year. (*She shakes her head at the dissolved dream*) we was going to

set away, little by little, don't you know, and buy a little place out in Morgan Park. We

had even picked out the house. (*Chuckling a little*) Looks right dumpy today. But Lord,

child, you should know all the dreams I had 'bout buying that house and fixing it up and

making me a little garden in the back ---- (*She waits and stops smiling*) and didn't none

of it happen. (ARITS 44 -- 45)

The insurance money, ten thousand dollar, was a big amount for the Younger Family, because they never receive such an amount in their life. Even though each member of the family had different dreams, they gave importance to money. When the poor black people made every effort to earn some money for their survival, the other side of the world, the white people were enjoying their life with money. Ruth, Walter Lee's wife and Mama had a conversation about the insurance money and the white people, which expresses the inability of poor black people to do all those things.

RUTH You know what you should do, Miss Lena? You should take yourself a trip
somewhere. To Europe or South America or some place---

MAMA (*Throwing up her hands at the thought*) Oh, child!

RUTH I'm serious. Just pack up and leave! Go on away and enjoy yourself some.

Forget about the family and have yourself a ball for once in your life----

MAMA (*Drily*) You sound like I'm just about ready to die. Who'd go with me? What I
look like wandering 'round Europe by myself?

RUTH Shoot---- these here rich white women do it all the time. They don't think
nothing of packing up they suitcases and piling on one of them big steamships
and---- swoosh!---- they gone, child.

MAMA Something always told me I wasn't no rich white woman. (ARITS 43 – 44)

Beneatha, Lena's daughter, a bold and independent girl, was always fighting for her distinctiveness. Once, Walter talked about the insurance money with Beneatha and they started arguing about their dreams. She articulated her dream of becoming a doctor while her brother refused to accept her wish. They fought with each other for anything which they couldn't tolerate. Mama and Ruth had a glance of everything and remain quiet and then discuss with themselves. Their argument was like this:

WALTER Who the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy 'bout
messing 'round with sick people---- then go be a nurse like other women—or
just get married and be quiet....

BENEATHA Well--- you finally got it said ... It took you three years but you finally
got it said. Walter, give up: leave me alone---- it's Mama's money.

WALTER He was my father, too!

BENEATHA So what? He was mine too--- and Travis' grandfather--- but the
insurance money belongs to Mama. Picking on me is not going to make
her give to you to invest in any liquor stores--- (Underbreath, dropping

into a chair) --- and I for one say, God bless Mama for that! (ARITS 38)

The reason for the clash among the family members in one way or other is that they should overcome the dominated white culture through their lifestyle. Hansberry took one family from the Southside Chicago to elucidate the harsh experiences of the whole black communities. Every day, they were facing embarrassed situations from their white neighbourhood. Here, the black men who are very much disturbed by the treatment of white people. Walter was the only matured man in the family and he had the responsibility of taking the whole family in a better manner, but he couldn't. He was always grumbling about something or other. For example, one day, when he was having his breakfast with his wife, he didn't give attention to his wife's talking and he was muttering to himself, not even had glance at his wife, and said: "This morning, I was looking in the mirror and thinking about it ... I'm thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room--- (*Very, very quietly*) ---- and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live..." (ARITS 34). In the view of Umakant S. Patil, this play "is a penetrating study into the social equality. The economic and racial inequality practised by the whites in America for long has once been highlighted" (Patil 114).

Mama was the one who synchronizes everybody in the family, though they have difference of opinion. She was a good believer of God and a subservient personality. Sometimes she had a thought that God helps only white people, which is the thought every black people always having in their mind. Once, in conversation with Ruth she said, "Seem like God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams --- but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worthwhile." (ARITS 45---46) Unlike Mama, her daughter was an unbeliever of God with her agnostic ideas. She said,

Mama, you don't understand. It's all a matter of ideas, and God is just one idea I don't accept. It's not important. I'm not going out and be immoral or commit crimes because I don't believe in God. I don't even think about it. It's just that I get tired of Him getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort. There simply is no blasted God--- there is only man and it is *he* who makes miracles! (ARITS 51)

However the Younger family was poor and marginalized each character in the family wished for doing a good job. In the case of Beneatha, her desire was that of becoming a doctor to save African people, she wanted to hoard her own African people from the atrocious hands of whites. She was familiar with the African people by one of her lover, an African boy, Asagai. It is shocking that the black people in the European continents themselves by no means come across any native African people. For example, in a conversation between mama and Beneatha, when Mama received Asagai in her home, she said,

Well you are quite welcome. I just hope you understand that our house don't always look like this. (*Chatterish*) You must come again. I would love to hear all about---(*Not sure of the name*) --- your country. I think it's so sad the way our American Negroes don't know nothing about Africa 'cept Tarzan and all that. And all that money they pour into these churches when they ought to be helping you people over there drive out them French and

Englishmen done taken away your land. (ARITS 63—64)

Through Walter Lee's character, Hansberry conveys a message that the poor black people think that anything can be done with money. For instance, Walter Lee was also a hardworking man in some extent, but he often got tired of seeing white people's luxurious life. So he was always talking something or other about money and rich people and a good job. Once he, in his tension, complained about his job. In his words it is mentioned as: "A job. (*Looks at her*) Mama, a job? I open and close car doors all day long. I drive a man around in his limousine and I say, "Yes, sir; no, sir; very good, sir; shall I take the drive, Sir?" Mama, that ain't nothing at all. (*Very quietly*) Mama, I don't know if I can make you understand" (ARITS 73) Then they were talking about money, she added, "Oh--- (*Very quietly*) So now it's life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life—now it's money. I guess the world really do change... (ARITS 73) From this instance, we can understand, the older generation of the black people needs freedom to think, learn, earn and act while the younger generation of them needs only money. They think that they can do everything they want if they have money, as Walter Lee told her mother: "(*with immense passion*) Because it is life, Mama!" (ARITS 73).

Though the youngsters in the Younger family had many dreams, Mama, the managing power of the family took the decision at the end. She persuaded everybody especially, Walter Lee to obey her for buying a new house in a white neighbourhood. Critics say that this play is the one which replicates Hansberry's own life. Hansberry herself wished to live happily for generation to generation as she found the life was so important to everybody, but, unfortunately, she couldn't attain it. At a Conference on "The Negro Writer and His Roots", held on March 1, 1959, she addressed her fellow black writers that,

I wish to live because life has within it that which is good, that which is beautiful, and
that which is love. Therefore, since I have known all these things, I have found them to be
reason enough and- I wish to live. Moreover, because this is so, I wish others to live for
generations to generations. (qtd. in. To Be Young Gifted and Black)

In their peaceful coexistence, the racial politics of their new white neighbourhood approached them in the representation of Karl Linder, the chairman of Clybourne Park Improvement Association. He met the Youngers and asked them to withdraw their intension to live in the Clybourne Park. He tried his level best to convince them to accept his deal; he started his talk with the words,

Well, I don't know how much you folks know about our organization. (*He is a gentle;
thoughtful and somewhat labourd in his manner*) It is one of these community
organizations set up to look after—oh, you know, things like block upkeep and special
projects and we also have what we call our New Neighbors Orientation Committee...
(ARITS 115)

And he introduced his committee's name and his position to answer the question of Beneatha as,

(*Turning a little to her and then returning the main force to WALTER*) Well---it's what you might call a sort of
welcoming committee, I guess. I mean they, we I'm the chairman of the committee---go around and see the new people

who move into the neighborhood and sort of give them the lowdown on the way we do things out in Clybourne Park. (ARITS 115)

Hansberry audaciously recited the actual circumstances that the black people experienced in the mid-twentieth century. From the words of the white man, Linder, we can understand how much black people were kept away from the whites. He added,

Well—you see our community is made up of people who've worked hard as the dickens for years to build up that little community. They're not rich and fancy people; just hard-working, honest people who don't really have much but those little homes and a dream of the kind of community they want to raise their children in. Now, I don't say we are perfect and there is a lot wrong in some of the things they want. But you've got to admit that a man, right to want to have the neighbourhood he lives in a certain kind of way. And at the moment the over-whelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better, take more of a common interest in the life of the community, when they share a common background. I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn't enter into it. It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities. (ARITS 118)

The Youngers didn't want to surrender themselves to the egotistical white people and Walter Lee ordered Linder to leave their house. But Walter Lee and his friend Bobo had dealing with Willy Haris and he gave him sixty-five hundred dollars, the money given by his mother, Mama to deposit it in the bank for the study of Beneatha and their future investments. Willy Haris betrayed them by absconding. So he called Linder to have a business deal of having sold their new house. But the advices of his family members made him to change himself to behave like a man and he stubbornly told Linder about their planning to move their new house. Walter's words of gutless to Linder that,

And we have decided to move into our house because my father—my father—he earned it for us brick by brick. (*Mama has her eyes closed and is rocking back and forth as though she were in church, with her head nodding the Amen yes*) We don't want to make no trouble for nobody or fight no causes, and we will try to be good neighbors. And that's all we got to say about that. (*He looks the man absolutely in the eyes*) We don't want your money. (He turns and walks away) (ARITS 148)

CONCLUSIONS

As the title suggests, the Younger family had to face the obstacles rendered by the white people when they were going to attain their dreams of having a new house. They selected the place where the white folks lived because they couldn't find a place as cheap cost as the house in Clybourne Park. In a conversation with Walter Mama told him that, "Son—I just tried to find the nicest place for the least amount of money for my family" (93) At first, the family members couldn't accept the place where there were no black people, but the words of Mama convinced them to accept the fact and they could stay in their own stand. Though they socially and economically struggled at their earlier stage, they could stand together to abolish the racial politics of the white people and cross the threshold of their dream house.

REFERENCES

1. Bernstein, Robin. (Spring 1999). "Inventing a Fishbowl: White Supremacy and the Critical Reception of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*." *Modern Drama* 42.1: 16-27.
2. Gourdine, Angeletta Km. (Winter 1998). "The Drama of Lynching in Two Black Women's Drama, Or Relating Grimke's *Rachel* to Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*." *Modern Drama* 41.4: 553-545.
3. Hansberry, Lorraine. (1987). *A Raisin in the Sun*. Ed. Robert Nemiroff. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, INC.
4. Kamini, R. (Jan-Mar 2011). "But Some of Us are Brave: Emerging Female Power in the Select Plays of Alice Childress and Lorraine Hansberry." *Contemporary Vibes* 6.22: 18-20.
5. Mathews, Kristin L. (Win 2008). "The Politics of Home in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*." *Modern Drama* 51.4: 556-578.
6. Patil, Umakant S. (Jan 2011). "A Raisin in the Sun: Unrealised Dreams of a Black Family." *Thematics* 2 113-115.
7. Ray, Mohit K. and Rama Kundu. (2005). *Studies in Women Writers in English: Vol. II*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, xii, 192.

